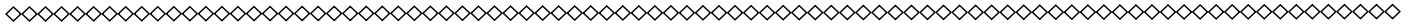




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Sermon Brief
Text: Psalm 128
Title: The Blessing of God upon the Family
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Seeking to faith-
fully proclaim
the whole coun-
cil of God in
scripture!



INTRODUCTION

With the dedication of Joseph today, we focus upon the family in the worship service. The Bible has much to say about the family and God's will for it. This is true in both the Old and New Testaments, both from the perspective of ancient Israel and from the perspective of early Christianity. In both religious traditions the family played a central role in the religious life of the people of God. Covenant Israel in the Old Testament was centered in the family as the foundational unit of the Israelite people. The prosperity of the nation was closely linked to the level of stability of the Israelite family. From the teachings of Jesus and the apostles in the New Testament it is clear that this central role of the family continued into Christianity. The church of Jesus Christ is often described in terms of a family. The primary meeting place of Christians for the first three centuries was in a home.

This crucial role of family in ancient Israelite / Christian tradition stands often in sharp contrast to modern western society. We live in a day in both Europe and North America where the family is under huge pressures and more often than not is gradually crumbling into ruin. We can't even decide what constitutes a family today. Does it take a father and a mother along with a child in order to have a family? In the Bible the answer to that question was an unequivocal 'yes.' But in twenty first century western culture, we don't know the answer to this question. Contemporary society at large attempts to redefine the definition of family way beyond the biblical standards. The splintering of families into single parent families, the attempt to have a family without marriage, the corruptive influence of the gay world on the family -- all these and more are bringing family life to one of the lowest points it has experienced ever in western society.

The opportunity for the people of God in today's world is to refocus emphasis upon the biblical based family. The Bible sets forth clearly ideals for the family and calls upon God's people to implement them into its experience of family life. Each time we have one of the baby dedication services our church seeks to call attention to various aspects of the Christian family as set forth in scripture. Today is no exception.

In the book of Psalms there are two psalms that are particularly devoted to the ancient Israelite family, Psalms 127 and 128. Earlier we gave attention to Psalm 127, and today I want to speak to you from Psalm 128. Turn with me in your Bible to this passage, and hear the Word of God from this text.

- 1 Happy is everyone who fears the Lord,
who walks in his ways.
- 2 You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands;
you shall be happy, and it shall go well with you.
- 3 Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house;
your children will be like olive shoots around your table.
- 4 Thus shall the man be blessed who fears the Lord.
- 5 The Lord bless you from Zion.
May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem
all the days of your life.
- 6 May you see your children's children.
Peace be upon Israel!

The background and setting of this psalm in the worship life of ancient Israel give particular meaning to the text. In the title, the psalm is identified as a 'psalm of ascents.' Psalms 120 - 134 fall into this category. What does this mean? Although absolute detailed certainty is not possible, the evidence strongly suggests that this psalm was spoken to the pilgrims who traveled to Jerusalem to worship God in the temple. Or, perhaps it was sung by the pilgrims as they ascended up the steps into the temple for worship. Some scholars are convinced that the psalm was either sung by pilgrims or spoken by the priest to the pilgrims as the worshipers were leaving the temple as a final reminder of the promise of God's blessing upon faithfulness to God by the Israelite worshipers. In either case, the psalm served to remind the Israelite worshiper of how much importance God placed upon his family and how important genuine devotion to God was for God to be able

to bless his family.

Also to be noted is that the psalm reflects ancient Jewish wisdom understanding of religious truth. This means that the religious perspective given in the psalm is going to see God's blessings in terms of practical everyday life experience rather than in more abstract theological terms as is the case in other streams of religious teaching found in the Old Testament.¹ In Psalm 128, the emphasis is upon fearing God and the blessings that come in terms of family to those who fear the Lord. The wise person will follow what is set forth; the foolish person rejects it. This aspect of the psalm cautions us about making application to our day. The New Testament writers took ancient Israelite wisdom perspectives and applied them more in spiritual terms rather than in material terms. This becomes an interpretive model for us today in seeking to find meaning and application to ancient Israelite wisdom perspectives in the Old Testament.² Fundamental patterns with basic spiritual principles can be correctly gleaned from such Old Testament texts, and need confirmation in New Testament texts in order to be more certain as correct applications. Otherwise a crass materialistic application of such texts will often be made, and such are clearly denied by New Testament principles of Christian teaching.

One last thing to be noted about Psalm 128. The view point reflected in the psalm is that of the male head of the ancient Israelite household. This is to be expected in an Old Testament text. Ancient Israelite society of strongly patriarchal with the male head of the household in a very dominating role over the family. The New Testament modifies this in toning down the absolute dominance of the male head of the family.³ The essential role of the husband / father as the leader of the family is maintained by the New Testament. And thus constitutes a legitimate thrust of application of this psalm from a Christian perspective.

What then does God say to the families of our day from Psalm 128? Two things emerge from the literary structure of the psalm.

BODY

I. God's blessings come to the godly family , vv. 1-3

- 1 Happy is everyone who fears the Lord,
who walks in his ways.
- 2 You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands;
you shall be happy, and it shall go well with you.
- 3 Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house;
your children will be like olive shoots around your table.

First, note the foundation of such blessing: fearing the Lord.

Twice in this psalm comes the phrase, 'who fears the Lord,' vv. 1, 4. What does this mean? Verse one presents this from both attitude and action: to fear the Lord means to walk in His ways. The Hebrew word "yārē" (יָרֵא) for fear simply means to "be afraid of, to reverence, to hold in respect, to honor." At the heart of the idea is that we look toward God with deep respect and honor. God is God and we must so acknowledge Him.

Attitudes of irreverence and disrespect toward God are completely forbidden in scripture. The Ten Commandments that are foundational to religious experience begin with the first four commandments demanding proper respect and reverence toward God (Exodus 20:1-11):

1 Then God spoke all these words: 2 I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; 3 you shall have no other gods before me. 4 You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. 5 You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, 6 but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation

¹For example, see Psalm 1:1-2 with the focus on the Law of God as the basis of divine blessing: "1 Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers; 2 but their delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law they meditate day and night." Note also Psalm 32:1-2, "1 Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. 2 Happy are those to whom the Lord imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit."

²For a helpful discussion of ancient 'wisdom,' see C. Hassell Bullock, "Wisdom," *Baker's Theological Dictionary of Biblical Theology* online.

³For example, note the powerful demands placed upon this individual in the Haustafeln materials of Col. 3:18-4:1 and Eph. 5:21-6:9. 1 Peter 2:13-3:7 discusses family responsibilities with minor emphasis upon the male head of the household.

of those who love me and keep my commandments. 7 You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name. 8 Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work. 10 But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. 11 For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.

Ancient Israel began its religious life with deep reverence and respect for God. In its public worship and in family devotions the name of God was held in profound reverence. In fact, the central Hebrew name for God, Yahweh, would never even be pronounced out loud. Only the high priest in his annual offering of sacrifice in the Holy of Holies in the Jerusalem temple would say this name out loud, and then only when alone with God in this inner room inside the temple. Jewish interpretive tradition held that to say this name out loud was a serious violation of the commandment to keep God's name holy in Exodus 20:7.

When a family, or a society, fails to show respect for God that family not only risks the anger and wrath of God, it also loses something vital to a healthy and stable family life. It loses its ability to show proper respect to one another, and especially of children to respect their parents. Anger and conflict inside modern family life is wrecking the stability of families in our world. Violence and crime in society is in direct proportion to what goes on inside families. Modern western societies have developed extensive measures in its effort to address this issue. My sister, for example, is a psychologist with a specialization in family therapy. She has spent her entire career as a psychologist seeking to help families find ways of resolving conflict and turmoil. Family counseling is a major emphasis on both sides of the Atlantic. Countless millions of Euros are spent annually both in Europe and in the US in funding programs seeking to bring greater stability to family life. One of the major sources of problems in family life today is the loss of respect by family members.

The ancient world in general was smarter than modern society in its recognition of the basic role that respect and reverence should play in society. And most ancient cultures centered this respect in religion. Respect for people began with proper respect for deity. Without the latter there would be little of the former.

But we have largely lost this in our world today. And we desperately need to regain it. But how? Ancient Israel imposed drastic measures upon those who expressed disrespect for God by executing them. Also, those who also failed to show proper respect to people in authority roles such as parents were subject to execution as well. Is this the way for modern society to relearn proper respect? I doubt that imposing the death penalty on people who use God's name in vain would accomplish the desired goal. Amazingly we are witnessing in our day the Islamic reaction to perceived disrespect to its god Allah. Massive protest reactions are generated by the more extremist elements in Moslem dominated countries that usually leads to people being killed. No serious political leader in western society is prepared to put similar laws in place with such intention of requiring respect for the name of God.

One important key to changing our society's attitude toward God is for God's people in that society to set the example. And critical to God's people accomplishing this is the godly family. Respect for God, and then respect for one another inside the family, must dominate family life. Without it, the family and society will continue to plunge head long into ruin.

Reverence for God is expressed in the way one lives. The parallel strophe in verse one to 'fears the Lord' is 'walks in his ways.' Ancient Israel recognized that no reverencing of God was genuine that did not flow into a life of obedience to God. To claim to honor God meant to live according to the demands of God! Attitude and action are inseparably linked together.

Down through the centuries individuals have sometimes sought to divorce the two ideas. "I can respect God without obeying Him," is the false thinking of many. Absolutely dumb thinking! If you aren't obeying God, you have no respect for Him. This is unquestionably the position of both the Old and New Testaments.

The wise sages of ancient Israel, such as the composer of our psalm, recognized that obeying God's ways is critical for the family. And that such obedience starts with the husband and father of the family. Thus pilgrims coming to the temple to worship God affirmed this principle in the singing of this psalm as a part of their worship experience of God.

Fathers, I challenge you today: Set the right example to your wife and kids! Reverence God in your life. And show that reverence by living according to the ways of God. Lead your family to be godly and god-fearing.

Second, note the extension of such blessing to the family.

The psalm begins with the beatitude 'happy is...'. The Hebrew 'esher (אֲשֶׁר) simply means "happy, blessed, fortunate" etc.⁴ The pronouncement of the beatitude is simply that the person fearing God is blessed

⁴"The verb occurs in the Qal only in Prov 9:6, "go / walk in the way of understanding." In the Piel it is used

by God, and thus very fortunate in life. Verses two and three define the content of that blessing in terms of ancient Israelite wisdom perspective. Such perspectives sees basic general principles at work in daily life, but never absolutizes them in the way modern western rationalism tends to do. These are fundamental principles that can be observed in the lives of individuals following the principles.

The psalmist sees two basic areas of blessing here:

The reverent person enjoys a full productive life, v. 2: “You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands; you shall be happy, and it shall go well with you.”

When one honors God properly in his life, life becomes enormously more satisfying and rewarding. Modern western society aspires to a ‘successful’ life, largely made up of material prosperity. A large home, big auto, lots of money in the bank, a high paying career etc. - these are the components of the ‘good life.’ But even in achieving most all these things millions of people are empty and not satisfied by life. There’s a haunting fear that something critically important is still missing. And so the chase after an illusion about happiness coming from things continues, and often grows increasingly desperate as nothing satisfies those deeper longings.

The psalmist recognized happiness and satisfaction in life comes not from accumulating things, nor from building one’s life around things. Instead, life, and happiness in life, is made up of something deeper. To work hard and then see the fruits of that labor -- this brings satisfying happiness in life. To be able to enjoy life in a deep sense of satisfaction with one’s life -- this is real happiness. To experience consistency and predictability in one’s life -- this is true happiness. To experience life in this way means we experience the real ‘good’ life.⁵ Such a life is indeed ‘good’ because it is filled with positive things that together produce a wonderfully

eleven times with several nuances of which the most prominent is “to bless, called blessed”: Gen 30:13; Mal 3:12, 15; Job 29:11; Ps 72:17; Prov 31:28; Song 6:9; similarly in two cases in the Pual, Ps 41:2 [H 3]; Prov 3:18. The relationship, if any, between Qal “to go” and Piel “to bless” is not apparent. Two derivatives each come from the meaning “bless,” and “to walk.”

There are two verbs in Hebrew meaning “to bless.” One is *bārak* and the other *’āšar*. Can any differences between them be tabulated? For one thing *bārak* is used by God when he “blesses” somebody. But there is no instance where *’āšar* is ever on God’s lips. When one “blesses” God the verb is *bārak*, never *’āšar*. One suggestion to explain this sharp distinction, i.e. that *’āšar* is reserved for man, is that *’āšar* is a word of envious desire, “to be envied with desire is the man who trusts in the Lord.” God is not man and therefore there are no grounds for aspiring to his state even in a wishful way. Similarly God does not envy man, never desires something man is or has, which he does not have, but would like to have. Therefore God never pronounces man “blessed” (*’āšrê*) (Janzen). It should also be pointed out that when *bārak* is used the initiative comes from God. God can bestow his blessing even when man doesn’t deserve it. On the other hand, to be blessed (*’āšrê*), man has to do something. Finally, *bārak* is a benediction, *’āšar* more of a congratulation. The former is rendered by *elogētos* in the LXX and the latter by *makarios*.

To be “blessed” (*’āšrê*), man has to do something. Usually this is something positive. A “blessed” man, for example, is one who trusts in God without equivocation: Ps 2:12; 34:8 [H 9]; 40:4 [H 5]; 84:5 [H 6]; 84:12 [H 13]; 146:5; Prov 16:20. A “blessed” man is one who comes under the authority of God’s revelation: his Torah, Ps 119:1; 1:2; Prov 29:18; his word, Prov 16:20; his commandment, Ps 112:1; his testimony, Ps 119:2; his way, Ps 128:1; Prov 8:32. The man who is beneficent to the poor is blessed (Ps 41:1 [H 2]); Prov 14:21). Note the negative approach of Ps 1, “blessed is the man who does not.” He isolates himself and shuns the company of certain people, the ungodly. The psalm ends by noting that it is precisely these ungodly who will in the end be isolated. They will not stand in the judgment. They will be conspicuous by their absence for they will perish.” [R. Laird Harris, Robert Laird Harris, Gleason Leonard Archer and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, electronic ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 80-81.]

⁵טוֹב (tôb) (be) good, beneficial, pleasant, favorable, happy, right. Hiphil “to do good,” etc.... (tôb). , pleasant, beautiful, delightful, glad, joyful, precious, correct, righteous. (The nouns *tôb* and *tôbâ* are treated as substantival usages of the adjective, since there is no distinction in meaning between them.) Hebrew idiom often uses *tôb* where English idiom would prefer a more specific term such as “beautiful” or “expensive.”

“Good” is well attested referring to practical or economic benefit. Good fruit (Gen 2:9) and the grain of Pharaoh’s dream (Gen 41:5, 36) were good for eating. The “good” of Joseph’s enslavement (Gen 50:20) included such practical benefits as food and national survival. Practical administrative disadvantages were involved in Moses’ judging which was “not good” (Ex 18:17). Other practical goods denoted by this term are: the promise of victory denied to Ahab (II Chr 18:7); hospitality and friendship (Gen 26:29); beneficial counsel (II Sam 17:7, 14); general economic prosperity (I Kgs 10:7); agricultural prosperity (Hos 10:1, ASV); and God’s intentions (Amos 9:4). The violent life (Prov 16:29) and deeds which undermined the morale of the nation (Neh 5:9) are called “not good.” The “good” of labor may refer to the practical gain from work (Eccl 3:13; but cf. RS^v “pleasure”).

“Good” is used in respect to a wide variety of abstract perspectives. A good name is better than descendants in respect to fame and reputation (Isa 56:5). David’s loyalty to Achish, his feudal lord, is described as “good” (I Sam 29:9,

satisfying life.

The reverent person enjoys a productive full family, v. 3: “Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your children will be like olive shoots around your table.”

The second area of blessing reflects the typical ancient Israelite understanding of family: a wife who produces many children,⁶ and children who provide the father with great comfort and happiness. While mod-

RS^v “blameless”). Elihu challenged his companions to determine what was good in respect to truth or validity (Job 34:4). For the wise men, slowness of anger was more desirable than the violent strength of the warrior ideal (Prov 16:32). Likewise, the poor wise child was “better” than the stubborn king (Eccl 4:13).

Esthetic or sensual goodness may be denoted. It describes the beauty, or desirability, of the “daughters of men” to the “sons of God” (Gen 6:2), Rebekah’s beauty (Gen 24:16), and Bathsheba’s beauty (II Sam 11:2). English idiom prefers “handsome” when this term describes men (I Sam 16:12). Sensory delight is at issue in describing the “sweetness” of cane (Jer 6:20), and in Namaan’s judgment that the waters of Damascus were “better” than the muddy waters of the Jordan (II Kgs 5:12). Sensual desirability is included in describing one vintage as better than another (Jud 8:2).

“Good” frequently means “happy.” It describes the happy occasion of a royal wedding (Ps 45:1 [H 2]). A happy feast can be described as a “good day” (Est 8:17; RS^v “holiday”; cf. I Sam 25:8). The “good heart” describes happiness (II Chr 7:10; Prov 15:15). Happiness may be induced by alcohol (Eccl 9:7).

A related idiom is the usage of “good in [one’s] eyes” to express preference or will. Examples are the escaped slave’s preference for a domicile (Deut 23:16; RS^v “where it pleases him”) and Zelophehad’s daughters’ preferences for husbands (Num 36:6). God’s will may be thus expressed (I Sam 3:18). It describes perverted, sinful desires (Gen 19:8; Jud 19:24). In such cases, the idiom is without moral significance.

ṭôb may include ideas of superior quality or relative worth. As such it describes the “pure” gold of Havilah (Gen 2:12) and high quality perfumed oils (Song 1:3; RS^v “anointing oils”). Quality craftsmanship is thus designated (Isa 41:7), as is quality or nobility in human character, as when Moses is described as “goodly” (i.e. “noble”; Ex 2:2). An important usage of this term refers to moral goodness. The command, “Depart from evil and do good” (Ps 34:14 [H 15]) clearly contrasts “good” with moral evil. The “good way” which God will teach his reluctant people refers to moral life (I Kgs 8:36). “Good” and “right” *yāšār*, often occur as parallel terms for moral goodness (II Chr 14:1; 31:20). Finally, Eccl uses *ṭôb* in the sense of the philosophical *summum bonum*. Ecclesiastes 2 tells the reader that there is no higher good than the life of hedonistic pleasure (v. 24) and, in this context, raises the question of what is the “Good” which man should seek. Other references could be interpreted similarly (Eccl 3:22; 8:15).

Some usages blend two or more of the areas of meaning discussed above. The “good land” of the Old Covenant included practical, economic, and esthetic overtones (Deut 1:25; Josh 23:13). Likewise, the concept of God as “good” is rich with the overtones of all possible meanings of the term “good” (I Chr 16:34; Ps 145:9). In light of the above discussion, each individual usage must be clearly examined to see which of the above meanings are possible.

A number of literary expressions need special treatment. “Good and evil” serves as an idiom of universality (Num 24:13; II Sam 13:22). Some have suggested that the tree of knowledge of good and evil involves no more than this idiom of universality (Gen 2:9), but the total context of early Gen is based upon a moral significance for the phrase. To acknowledge the word of another as “good” was to indicate assent or acceptance; moral judgment is not the issue (II Kgs 20:19; cf. I Sam 20:7). The “good eye” indicates generosity (Prov 22:9; RS^v “bountiful eye”). In Eccl, “to see Good” is translated as experiencing the good things or the joys of life (Eccl 5:17; RS^v “find enjoyment”; Eccl 6:6; RS^v “enjoy no good”). [R. Laird Harris, Robert Laird Harris, Gleason Leonard Archer and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, electronic ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 345-346.]

⁶Quite interesting is the perspective of a modern Jewish mother with many children: “In a functionally healthy context, many children multiply life’s joys while dividing its sorrows. Happy occasions are more festive, sad situations are mitigated by the caring and sharing of kith and kin. It is for good reason that many communities encourage “Big-Brother and “Big-Sister” clubs. There is singular comfort in the know that one belongs to someone who takes a personal interest in him or her and with whom one shares a special bond. The security of being part of a larger whole can be matched by little else.

“Another bonus of sizable families is one of “economy.” In my experience the most difficult time was when I had but one child. I carried all the responsibility. My daughter was dependent on me exclusively. When her younger sister came along, with time, they entertained each other. As the family expanded they looked out for each other, helped cleanup, baby-sat, assisted each other with homework -- each contributing to the well being of the family with their unique talents, proclivities, and resources. The family unit became the flint against which the children ignited the flames of their manifold talents and abilities.

“Another benefit, in my experience, has been the way in which children use the family as a testing ground for developing their social skills. A large family provides an ideal laboratory for the definition of interpersonal competence. Parents know that no matter how many children they have no two are ever alike. Curiously, just when we think we have

ern families tend not to be as large, one can find God's blessing in a wonderful wife and in children who become a source of joy rather than pain.

The timeless point of application is that the husband / father should find deep joy in his wife and children. He should view them as blessings from God and treat them accordingly. In developing the strong, positive relationship with them, especially as defined from Christian perspectives in the New Testament Haustafeln passages, family will become a source of immense blessing.⁷

Fathers, see your family this way: as God's blessing to you. Then treat them accordingly!

II. God's blessings come upon the leader of a godly family, vv. 4-6

4 Thus shall the man be blessed who fears the Lord.

5 The Lord bless you from Zion.
May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem
all the days of your life.

6 May you see your children's children.
Peace be upon Israel!

The leader of the family is key to God's blessings on the family.

The perspective of the psalmist is that the husband / father is the key to God's blessings on the family. In the idealized family of ancient Israelite society the leadership of the husband / father was critical. The early Christian view affirms this responsibility of the male leader of the home, but modifies it by placing substantially more responsibilities on the Christian father and husband. In American society this responsibility has often been ignored or rejected even in Christian homes. The wife and children attend church while the husband ignores God and his responsibilities to his family. Consequently the family struggles with all kinds of problems and weaknesses. A growing number of churches in the US are attempting to develop men's programs in order to reaffirm the responsibility for family that God has placed upon the men. The longer I live in Germany the more I sense that German fathers are failing to be spiritual leaders pretty much like their American counterparts. But I don't yet see concerted efforts by many churches to develop a strong men's ministry in order to strengthen the spiritual life and responsibility of fathers and husbands. On the positive side, however, I have observed that many of those coming from other countries, notably Africa and Asia, have retained a stronger orientation on Christian fathers and husbands being good leaders in their homes. I want to commend today every man in this congregation who is taking seriously his responsibility to be a good spiritual leader in his home. May God bless you abundantly as the psalmist promises.

May you see not only a long fruitful life, but also may you live to enjoy your grand children as the psalmist speaks of here.

The blessings of God on the family are in connection to the community of faith.

In verses five and six, the psalmist reflects on the larger aspect of a divinely blessed family. This has impact on the nation as well. The literary nature of verse six b, "Peace be upon Israel," reflects a benediction most likely pronounced by the temple priests as the people sang the song of God's blessings down to this point. The spiritual insight reflected here is the awareness that the covenant people of God, Israel, enjoy God's peace and blessing to the degree that the Israelite men are properly leading their families. The welfare of the nation depends in large measure on what kind of fathers and husbands the men are.

Early Christianity also recognized this spiritual truth. The health of a nation depends upon the health

it down pat, the Almighty in his unfathomable wisdom and sense of humor dispatches to us yet another unique model. It is always a delightful but humbling experience to learn that each child comes with their very distinct personality, character, strengths, and weaknesses. Some are more flexible, and easy going, while others manage to drive everyone in their immediate vicinity "up the wall." The long-term advantage here is that in the context of a loving and supportive family, these different specimens of "human becomings," have the opportunity to learn to co-exist and interrelate with a wide variety of people. Having experienced many siblings of different temperaments they will be better equipped to handle challenging social situations, not necessarily of their choice.

"What about giving each child the love they need? Part of the occupational hazard or definition of being a parent in both large and small families is a feeling of insufficiency, of second guessing ourselves and beating ourselves up over our perceived limitations. I personally found peace and comfort in knowing that having brought children into the world in accordance to what I understood to be the Divine will that I was only human and that I could do no more than try my best." [Rebbetzin Feige Twerski, "The Joys of a Large Family," aish.com online]

⁷Note the powerful demands placed upon this individual in the Haustafeln materials of Col. 3:18-4:1 and Eph. 5:21-6:9.

of its families. And the health of the family depends upon the spiritual health of the men leading the families. Additionally, in the early church the principle was applied to the church primarily. In the Haustafeln materials of the New Testament,⁸ the family and the church are linked together in unbreakable fashion. The church cannot prosper if the families in it are not prospering.

This is why we place much emphasis upon the Christian family here in our church. The future of the IBC church Cologne depends in large measure on the spiritual health of the families in the church. This is the heart of the reason for the developing Women's Ministry, Single Women's Ministry, Youth Ministry, Children's Ministry, and Men's Ministry. We are working harder and harder to strength families in the life of our church. In so doing our church will become stronger. Both church and families will become objects of God's blessings in growing manner.

CONCLUSION

Today we dedicate not only Joseph to God, but we dedicate the Akanni family to God. We ask God to bless them in their commitment to Him. They have pledged themselves publicly to honor God in their home. May God grant us strong Christian homes. May the words of the Christian hymn become our prayer:

O give us homes built firm upon the Savior,
Where Christ is Head and Counselor and Guide;
Where every child is taught His love and favor
And gives his heart to Christ, the crucified:
How sweet to know that tho his footsteps waver
His faithful Lord is walking by his side!

O give us homes with godly fathers, mothers,
Who always place their hope and trust in Him;
Whose tender patience turmoil never bothers,
Whose calm and courage trouble cannot dim;
A home where each finds joy in serving others,
And love still shines, tho days be dark and grim.

O give us homes where Christ is Lord and Master,
The Bible read, the precious hymns still sung;
Where prayer comes first in peace or in disaster,
And praise is natural speech to every tongue;
Where mountains move before a faith that's vaster,
And Christ sufficient is for old and young.

O Lord, our God, our homes are Thine forever!
We trust to Thee their problems, toil, and care;
Their bonds of love no enemy can sever
If Thou art always Lord and Master there:
Be Thou the center of our least endeavor-
Be Thou our Guest, our hearts and homes to share.

⁸Cf. Col. 3:18-4:1 and Eph. 5:21-6:9.